Attraction Mechanism of Chinese Idol Talent Shows to Audiences

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Abstract. This study focuses on improving the increasingly homogeneous market of idol training talent shows. It is based on multiple academic papers and employs the method of literature analysis, comparatively analyzes the innovative aspects of the attraction mechanisms of Chinese idol training talent shows compared to those of other types of talent shows in China in the early years, make a systematical research on development history of Chinese idol training talent shows, and it takes "Produce101" for instance, make a contrast analysis of the attraction mechanisms of Chinese idol training talent shows before and after 2018 from five aspects: competition system design, audio-visual language, narrative techniques, business models and fan participation. The study found that Chinese idol training talent shows have undergone a development process from imitation and introduction to localization and innovation, several programs, such as "Produce101" and "Idol Producer" were produced. They attract audiences by enhancing fan engagement, creatively and rationally designing the competition system, enriching audio-visual techniques, applying companion-style narrative strategies, and promoting the systematization and diversification of business models. This article focuses on the development history and innovation points of idol training talent shows, analyzes the attraction mechanisms for their successful viewership, and conducts research on issues such as how they survive and develop, in order to promote related academic research and apply it more deeply in guiding practice.

Keywords: Chinese idol training talent shows, Produce101, audience attraction mechanisms, Super Idol, X fire.

1. Introduction

Since its first appearance in the 1980s, Chinese talent shows have undergone decades of innovation and development, gradually forming a unique form of the television entertainment industry. The birth of "Super Idol" in 2015 marked the emergence of a new type of idol training talent show. Subsequently, phenomenal programs such as "Produce 101" pushed this type into a stage of rapid development. With the expansion of the market scale, current idol training programs show a significant tendency of homogenization in terms of form and content. The weakening of program innovation has led to audience aesthetic fatigue. Homogeneous competition has seriously restricted the sustainable development of the industry. It is urgent to conduct a systematic study on the existing program attraction mechanism to seek a breakthrough path. This study aims to deeply analyze the

evolution patterns of the core attraction mechanisms of idol training talent shows in China by sorting out their development history, and the research findings will help reveal the intrinsic connection between program innovation and audience appeal, provide differentiated content production strategies for producers, and promote the formation of a healthy and diverse market competition environment, etc. This article adopts the literature analysis method to conduct a longitudinal examination of the representative programs from the initial "Super Idol" to the recent "Produce 101", with a focus on the program's core elements such as competition system design, audio-visual language, and narrative techniques, as well as the operation mechanisms such as business models and fan participation. It has high academic value and representativeness.

2. Case description

Since its emergence in the 1980s, Chinese talent shows have undergone multiple transformations and innovations and have become an important part of the television entertainment industry. Since the birth of "Super Idol" in 2015, Chinese talent shows have developed a new type of program - idol training talent shows. Over the past decade, they have not only been constantly evolving in form but also undergone certain changes in their social functions and cultural connotations. During this process, with the rapid expansion of the market, idol training talent shows in 2018-2019 entered a stage of localized innovation on the basis of "borrowing" or purchasing the copyright of South Korean talent show-"Produce101".Hu Zhifeng analyzed and believed that the program producers began to pay attention to the integration of local characteristics, making innovative adjustments in aspects such as competition system design and contestant selection, and developed local IPs such as "Produce 101" and "Idol Producer", introducing the concept of "producers for all". Zheng Xin's research shows that during this period, the total number of online votes exceeded 1 billion, and the scale of the fan economy witnessed explosive growth. Zhang Yiwu particularly emphasized that such programs not only cultivate a new idol industry but also promote the reconstruction of the entire entertainment industry ecosystem. The number of idol agencies has increased by 300% within two years, forming a complete industrial chain [1]. In addition, Wang Fu's industry report indicates that the market size of derivative products for idol training programs reached 2.5 billion yuan in 2019, demonstrating strong commercial monetization capabilities [2]. This article will take "Produce 101" as an example to analyze the attraction mechanism of Chinese idol training talent shows for audiences.

3. Analysis of the problems

The origin of talent shows in China can be traced back to the "Youth Singing TV Grand Prix" (referred to as "Youth Singing Competition") held by CCTV in 1984.The "Youth singing competition" aims mainly to discover and cultivate vocal talents. It is characterized by strong professionalism and high entry requirements. At this stage, the number of talent shows was relatively small, with the main purpose of serving the public and a low degree of commercialization [3]. In 2003, Hunan Satellite TV launched "Happy Boy", and in 2004, it introduced "Super Girl", marking the beginning of the flourishing stage of talent shows in China. In 2005, the second season of "Super Girl" created a phenomenon-level viewership miracle. The final viewership exceeded that of the "News Broadcast", ushering in the era of "Making Common People Stars" [4]. The talent shows at this stage have three major characteristics: high popularity, mature commercial models, and a clear trend of "Turn ordinary people into stars". Programs such as "I Am a Star" and "Come On!

Good Men" on Dragon TV and "Absolute Singing" on Jiangsu Satellite TV have been launched one after another, creating a craze for talent shows across the country.

From 2008 to 2011, due to severe homogenization and ethical irregularities, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television issued the "Entertainment Restriction Order" in 2007, strictly controlling talent shows. Since 2008, talent shows have entered a bottleneck period. Most of them have been suspended, and the ones that have persisted have had mediocre viewership [5]. At this stage, talent shows are confronted with problems such as aesthetic fatigue and insufficient innovation, and market enthusiasm has sharply declined. The period from 2012 to 2015 was the revival stage of talent shows. The popularity of Zhejiang Satellite TV's "The Voice of China" in 2012 marked the entry of talent shows into the revival stage. At this stage, talent shows abandoned the practice of hype and publicity, and focused on the innovation of program content and form. "The Voice of China" has achieved success through novel forms such as turning chair around, conducting blind audition and setting up mentor teams. Other programs like "The Voice of Heaven" and "The Most Beautiful Harmony" have also sought breakthroughs through differentiated positioning.

Since then, Chinese talent shows have been in a new boom period (from 2015 to the present). With the development of new media, talent shows have entered the online era. Since 2015, idol training programs such as "Star Asia", "X-Fire", "Summer Sweethearts" and "National Beauty Girls" have emerged. In 2018, "Idol Producer" and "Produce 101" pushed talent shows to a new peak.

Before the emergence of idol training talent shows, the talent shows on the market were roughly divided into two categories: ability competition talent shows and dream realization talent shows. Talent shows represented by "Super Girl" and "The Voice of China" are the most traditional types. This type of program usually has the following characteristics: it particularly regards the professional ability of the contestants as important, and strength determines success or failure. Moreover, it has judges in various professional fields and adds a comment section, which is authoritative. The vast majority have introduced audience voting mechanisms, giving the audience a strong sense of participation. Offer professional development opportunities as rewards [6]. "China Dream Show" is a typical representative of dream-fulfilling programs. Dream realization talent shows mainly resonate with the audience by telling the stories of ordinary people pursuing their dreams. This type of program usually consists of three elements: First, it showcases the true stories of ordinary people; Second, provide a stage for ordinary people to realize their dreams; Thirdly, as a platform, it seeks assistance from social forces for the participants. The program conveys positive values by showcasing the perseverance and hard work of dream chasers. "China Dream Show" focuses on people and their lives. By telling people's stories, it showcases the current living conditions of the general public in contemporary society. It comprehensively adopts a popular perspective and leaves the stage entirely to ordinary people.

The reason why idol training talent shows can stand out in the market dominated by these two types of talent shows is that they not only possess the advantages of these two types of shows but also have unique innovations. Firstly, idol training talent shows also often use story-telling narratives. For instance, by presenting the true and touching stories of the contestants, they attempt to move the audience and evoke emotional resonance among them [7]. Secondly, its interactivity has also been greatly enhanced. Through methods such as audience voting and multi-platform collaboration, the sense of audience participation has been improved [8]. In terms of value guidance, the starting point of idol training talent shows is to focus on conveying positive energy, such as persisting in dreams and striving hard, which caters to the psychological needs of the audience [9]. Some talent shows have made technological innovations, making use of new media technologies, such as setting up virtual avatars on the stage, to enhance the entertainment value of the programs,

create memorable points and improve the dissemination effect. Each talent show is committed to creating a differentiated positioning. Through unique content or forms (such as cultural inheritance talent shows), the programs avoid homogenized competition and thrive in a variety of ways.

It has also added many innovative points on this basis. The talent shows at this stage have four major characteristics: the "reality show + talent show" model, clear "star-making" purpose, strong fan participation, and a high degree of networking. The business model has undergone significant changes, with fan economy becoming the core driving force [4]. Adopting the format of "reality show + talent show", a "nurturing system" model is formed. Compared with the previous program setting of audience voting and multi-platform linkage, it further strengthens the audience's sense of participation and records the growth process of trainees throughout. Unlike traditional talent shows that only focus on stage performances, "Idol Producer" comprehensively showcases the growth trajectories of trainees through months of closed training, ratings, public performances and other stages. The audience witnesses the transformation of their idols as if they were "raising children in the cloud". Build an industrialized star-making system, benchmark against the South Korean model, and through professional grading assessment, clearly define the program's goal as creating the most beloved stars by the audience. Introduce standardized processes such as A-F rating assessment, theme song tasks, and group competitions from the Korean idol industry, emphasizing comprehensive singing and dancing skills. The role of mentors has become more specialized and innovative compared to before. Representatives of producers, dance mentors, music mentors, rap mentors have clear divisions of duties and provide professional guidance, which is different from the single professional field judges' comments in previous talent shows. Behind the programs, a complete "star-making" industrial chain has gradually been integrated. Through the collaboration of multiple agencies, trainees from various agencies have been gathered to expose the scattered idol resources in China, promoting the integration of industry resources. Zhang Yiwu particularly emphasized that such programs not only cultivate a new idol industry but also drive the reconstruction of the entire entertainment industry ecosystem. The number of idol management companies has increased by 300% within two years, forming a complete industrial chain [1]. The sense of participation of the audience and fans has reached an unprecedented level. Fans' votes fully determine the debut positions: the final debut group members are completely determined by the audience's votes, which overturns the traditional talent show model dominated by mentors. Mentors only play the initial role of grading and guidance, greatly enhancing the fans' engagement and stickiness. The degree of networking has been enhanced, the role played by the Internet has become more prominent, and the data of star-chasing behavior has been digitized. Idol training talent shows have given rise to activities such as ranking voting and purchasing sponsor products to obtain voting rights. The fan economy has been quantified to the extreme. Wang Fu's industry report indicates that the market size of derivative products of idol training programs reached 2.5 billion yuan in 2019, with extremely strong commercial monetization capabilities [2]. Through social media interaction, such as the interaction on trainees' Weibo and the dissemination of emoticons, a cross-platform topic effect is formed, promoting the three-dimensionalization of idols' personas and enhancing the conversion rate and stickiness of fans.

The development history of idol training talent shows in China can be traced back to July 2015. "Super Idol" was jointly produced by Haoyang Culture and Entertainment Co., LTD., Haiyao (Shanghai) Film and Television Media Co., LTD., China Broadcasting Tianze Media, Anhui Satellite TV, South Korea's MBC Television Station, KNOTE MUSIC and top South Korean artist management companies. As the first domestic reality show dedicated to nurturing youth and inspiring role models, this new program format has officially made its debut on the stage of China's

talent shows. Its rise and evolution profoundly reflect the transformation and reform of China's entertainment industry ecosystem. In November of the same year, the idol training program "X-Fire" jointly produced by Zhejiang Satellite TV, Tianyu Media and Tencent Video, directed by Ma Hao, with Li Yuchun, Shu Qi and others as guests, premiered. This program became a representative work of this period. These programs, through the operation mode centered on "Trainee Training Mechanism" and "The Decision-making Power of the Judging Panel", not only enhance the visibility of the training process but also lay the foundation for the basic model of Chinese idol training variety shows. Wang Peng's research data shows that the total return on investment of the first season of "X-Fire" reached 1:3.5, demonstrating the commercial potential of this model. It has given rise to the "Idol Producer" professional group and also promoted the professionalization of the domestic agency system [10]. The early development stage (2015-2017) witnessed the process of this type of program from introduction and imitation to initial localization.

Hu Zhifeng analyzed and believed that the program producers began to pay attention to the integration of local characteristics, making innovative adjustments in aspects such as competition system design and contestant selection, and developed local IPs such as "Produce 101" and "Idol Producer", introducing the concept of "producers for all". Zheng Xin's research shows that during this period, the total number of online votes exceeded 1 billion, and the scale of the fan economy witnessed explosive growth. Zhang Yiwu particularly emphasized that such programs not only cultivate a new idol industry but also promote the reconstruction of the entire entertainment industry ecosystem. The number of idol agencies has increased by 300% within two years, forming a complete industrial chain [1]. In addition, Wang Fu's industry report indicates that the market size of derivative products for idol training programs reached 2.5 billion yuan in 2019, demonstrating strong commercial monetization capabilities [2].

Take "Produce 101", which was born in 2018, as an example. Compared with previous programs of the same type, idol training talent shows after 2018 have achieved many pioneering localized results in terms of competition system design, audio-visual techniques, narrative methods, business models and fan participation.

Firstly, in terms of the competition system design, a shift has been achieved from mentor-led to user-led. "Produce 101" retains the core logic of the original "Produce 101", which is "The ranking is determined by the likes of the public". The executive producer Ma Yankun emphasized: "The ranking is determined by the logic of users' likes", and the votes cast by the audience fully determine the candidates for debut. In contrast, in the early days of idol training talent shows such as "Super Idol" and "X-Fire", the contestants' fates were mainly controlled by professional judges, relying more on the scores given by the mentors and the decisions made by the production team. By adding non-core competition system adjustments such as "Like King's Right to Turn the Tables" and "Revival of Observers", compared with the early similar programs that simply copied Korean talent shows, "Produce 101" has achieved a localization transformation. It not only retains the audience's dominance but also provides exposure opportunities for potential contestants. The program introduces A dynamic competition mechanism and adds sections such as "Class A battle" and "Challenge Match", where the mentors temporarily decide the PK opponents and results. This design enhances the drama, while the competition system of "X-Fire" is relatively static and lacks real-time competitive tension.

Secondly, "Produce 101" (《创造101》)employs multi-dimensional audio-visual techniques to present the personalities of the contestants. The program highlights the growth trajectories of the contestants by showcasing the linear editing strategy of "Storylines", while "Super Idol" places more emphasis on the technical presentation of stage performances. In terms of camera design, the

program team forced the allocation of shots through the competition system to avoid those contestants being marginal figures, ensuring that all 101 contestants had the opportunity to be exposed. In terms of stage design, the program employs AR technology to enhance the visual effects of the stage, such as virtual scene interaction during public performances. In contrast, the early "Burn Up, Boys!" still mainly relied on traditional stages with relatively few technological innovations.

Thirdly, in terms of narrative techniques, "Produce 101" is no longer the single competition of early idol training talent shows, but has risen to a deeper emotional resonance between the contestants and the audience. "Produce 101" adopts the narrative of "companion-style growth", emphasizing "natural cultivation". Through daily training clips, contestants' diaries and other materials, build emotional connections between the audience and the contestants, as well as between the contestants and their mentors. For instance, the audience watched throughout Yang Chaoyue's personal growth, and Huang Zitao, as the initiator, repeatedly emphasized the theme of "Original Aspiration", guiding the narrative towards the output of values. In contrast, "Super Idol" leans more towards competitive narrative and downplays the exploration of the individual stories of the contestants. "Produce 101" also uses controversial topics to stimulate social media discussions and form secondary dissemination through controversies such as "opaque vote counts" and "unequal distribution in camera allocation". "X-Fire" lacks the space for topic development due to its standardized process.

Fourthly, "Produce 101" has a more mature business model and has achieved full industrial chain operation. The 11-person team of "Produce 101" adopts a limited group form and full contract management. It is jointly operated by Penguin Pictures and Wowji Jiwa. Members are not allowed to carry out activities in parallel with their original company groups for two years, ensuring the concentrated release of commercial value. However, the debut group of "Super Idol" lacks a long-term operation plan, and its popularity is hard to sustain. "Produce 101" has launched derivative content and product placements. The program has developed exclusive behind-the-scenes footage for members, live broadcasts of contestants and other derivative contents, and innovatively integrated advertisements into the competition system, such as unlocking advertising benefits with likes. In the early development stage of idol training talent shows, such as "X-Fire", the business model still remained at the traditional stage of naming rights and interstitioning advertisements.

Fifth, in terms of fan participation, the audience has transformed from onlookers to "producers". "Produce 101" has enhanced fans' sense of participation through multi-level interactive designs. For instance, fans can directly influence the contestants' rankings by giving likes, voting, and discussing Weibo topics. They can even participate in the "Rescue and Revival" segment. The number of views on the program's Weibo topics has exceeded 10 billion. The interaction volume of bullet comments in a single issue exceeded ten million. However, the fan interaction of "Super Idol" is limited to text message voting, and the sense of participation is relatively weak. "Produce 101" has also innovatively started to operate emotional communities. The program team has strengthened fans' sense of belonging by releasing behind-the-scenes materials of the contestants and organizing offline meet-and-mortar meetings. However, the fan interaction of "X-Fire" merely remains at the level of one-way content consumption.

4. Suggestion

A large number of scholars' studies have shown that the development of idol training and talent shows in our country is facing sharp challenges.

Firstly, the talent show market in China is plagued by serious problems of homogenization and insufficient innovation. Many programs have similar formats and similar segment Settings, lacking originality. This phenomenon of following the trend not only leads to aesthetic fatigue among the audience, but also causes a waste of media resources. Insufficient innovation has become the main bottleneck restricting the development of talent shows [6,11].

Secondly, talent shows in China have become overly entertaining, leading to a deviation in values. Some talent shows tend to be overly entertaining, overly pursuing viewership ratings while neglecting social responsibility. The negative values such as money worship and showing off wealth that appear in the program may have a negative impact on teenagers. How to strike a balance between entertainment and value guidance is an important challenge faced by talent shows [9,12].

Thirdly, ethical misconduct is also an urgent problem that needs to be addressed in Chinese talent shows. During the development of talent shows, various ethical irregularities have emerged, including excessive hype, false promotion, and emotional show-making. Although the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television has issued regulatory policies on multiple occasions, in the Internet era, the difficulty of supervision has increased and the effect is limited. Establishing and improving a regulatory mechanism is an important guarantee for the healthy development of talent shows [3].

Fourthly, at present, the business models of China's talent shows are gradually becoming distorted, and sustainable development has become a difficult problem. There is an urgent need for business model innovation and industrial chain improvement. The business model of talent shows needs to shift from a single reliance on advertising to diversification. It can extend the industrial chain and develop value-added services such as derivatives, offline activities, and artist management. Explore new profit models such as membership systems and paid viewing, reduce reliance on advertising revenue, and achieve sustainable development.

5. Conclusion

Through a systematic review of multiple documents, this article comprehensively reviews the development process of Chinese idol training talent shows. Taking "Produce 101" as an example, it comparatively analyzes the attraction mechanisms of Chinese idol training talent shows around 2018 from five aspects: competition system design, audio-visual language, narrative techniques, business models, and fan participation. Research has found that talent shows have become an important part of China's television entertainment industry, providing audiences with novel viewing experiences and enriching the types of programs in our country. Chinese idol training talent shows have gone through a development process from imitation and introduction to local innovation, forming a number of programs represented by "Produce 101" and "Idol Producer". They attract audiences by enhancing fan engagement, creatively and rationally designing the competition system, enriching audio-visual techniques, applying companion-style narrative strategies, and promoting the systematization and diversification of business models. However, from the research of a large number of scholars, it can be known that Chinese idol training and talent shows are facing the phenomenon of homogenization due to replication and following the trend, as well as the tendency of value deviation and ethical misconduct. The overly entertaining program format and the authenticity of TV programs are being questioned. The highlighting of mainstream value orientations still has a long way to go. The development of future talent shows needs to continue exploring in the following aspects: First, enhance content innovation to avoid homogeneous competition; Second, deepen the integration with traditional culture and enhance cultural

connotations; Third, balance entertainment and social responsibility, and give full play to the guiding role of values; Fourth, utilize new technologies to innovate presentation forms and enhance interactive experiences; The fifth is to expand the industrial chain and innovate business models.

Relevant research has found that the research methods for idol training talent shows in China are relatively single, mainly focusing on content analysis and case studies, lacking quantitative research and longitudinal tracking. The representativeness of its audience research samples is also relatively insufficient, mostly concentrated on the adolescent student group. There is a lack of rigorous experimental design and comparative studies of control groups. The research perspective is also rather limited, overly focusing on the influence of values while neglecting other social and cultural dimensions. Research on industry entities such as program producers and talent agencies is still insufficient. The exploration of ethical dimensions is not in-depth enough. Insufficient attention has been paid to issues such as the protection of players' rights and interests and psychological intervention. There are still deficiencies in the research on phenomena such as group polarization and cyber violence in fan culture.

Chinese idol training talent shows have gone through nearly a decade of development, evolving from initial imitation and introduction to current local innovation, achieving remarkable success. In the face of the new media environment and social demands, talent shows need to keep pace with The Times, enhance cultural taste and social value while maintaining entertainment, and achieve healthy and sustainable development.

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